

International Relations as an Academic Discipline

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The study of international relations is at an intellectual crossroads. Research is increasingly restricted to narrow theoretical and empirical areas and to work of ephemeral importance. This affects the self-understanding of International Relations as a unified academic discipline. More significantly, and as a consequence, the dominant discourse in the field does not address the pressing philosophical questions which underlie the whole – that is, the global dimensions – of international political life. But it is the whole to which we ought to dedicate ourselves because, as Hegel writes, 'The truth is the whole'¹ and truth still ought to be the object of our intellectual endeavours.

Such scholastic aspirations are most unfashionable, and their educational relevance is often denied. Much of academia revolves around the questionable ethos of 'research-driven teaching', responding to ubiquitous and omnipotent 'market forces'. These forces undermine the ancient, for some too ancient, Socratic ideal of teaching, namely the responsibility of questioning.

In a context where particularistic thinking dominates, it becomes all the more important to address the philosophical presuppositions of the study of international relations. This essay offers a case for making such concerns central to the discipline. It begins with a general discussion of some critical aspects of contemporary academic training. The first section addresses the purposes of education, arguing that its task is, first and foremost, to nurture the formation of critical minds and cultivate intellectual sensitivity. Closely related to this pedagogical concern, the second section examines the assumptions which underpin several of the mainstream traditions of thought in International Relations and addresses the politics and 'practicality' of research. The third part of the essay focuses on two foundational areas which, I believe, warrant a more concentrated scientific and theoretical inquiry: dialectical epistemology and political philosophy. An analysis of these branches of knowledge will demonstrate the need to go beyond the traditional concerns of International Relations.

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented in January 1992 to the General Seminar in the International Relations Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I wish to thank colleagues and students for their valuable comments.

1. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 11.

The final section of the essay seeks to substantiate these claims by outlining the philosophical conditions for understanding the global ecological crisis. This example, perhaps more than any other, clearly demonstrates the educational necessity of broadening the scope of reflection in International Relations to include the ethical question: what is it to be human? Environmental issues compel us to expand the socio-historical framework of International Relations to encompass the inseparable connection between human history and that which ultimately underlies it, namely, nature. The regeneration of ethical consciousness allows us to place far-reaching practical concerns into philosophical perspective. A truly philosophical education in International Relations points the way out of particularist thinking and towards a positive, holistic reflection on the world in which we live.

The Purpose of the University: Education or Instruction?

Whatever the university needs to do in order to attract students and money, and thus to function smoothly as a teaching and research institution, its fundamental task is to encourage critical and self-critical thinking. It also exists to preserve philosophical reflection on first principles, on the conceptual beginnings of reasoning.²

Unfortunately, these objectives are being gradually but inexorably shouldered aside by an emphasis on instruction in the empirically relevant and the economically useful. There is a widespread tendency to move away from an education in the theoretical and creative use of reason, towards the banal and stifling calculation of a mundane self-interest. This emphasis on the particular, a common denominator of the various forms of liberalism, has become the great modern motivating principle. Fragmentation and relativism, which characterise so strongly the study of International Relations, destroy and distort education. If we no longer desire to search for objective values, we can not and will not strive for the highest standards of learning.

The consequence of this shift in educational focus is that the demands of a profession which ought to dedicate itself to the needs of humanity collide with an existential indifference to these ideals. Paradoxically, this collision is most readily evident in the so-called 'post-modern' turn. Post-modernists often seem to be capable only of providing commentary on the decline and demolition of the system in which they live like parasites and to which they belong as a stabilising factor. They are like the jesters and fools who used to be an integrative part of feudal and Renaissance courts.

The post-modernists think of themselves as critical even though they do not believe in objective standards. Without such standards, however, critique amounts to little more than the small-talk of intellectual idiosyncrasy. If critique cannot

2. See Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987) and Vittorio Hösle, *Die Krise der Gegenwart und die Verantwortung der Philosophie* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1990).

prove itself rationally, it is not to be taken seriously. The adoption of a pluralist attitude is frequently just a cynical effort to escape from the need to think coherently about focused questions and their underlying presuppositions. We may never obtain a final answer, but we must confront the dilemma, and ask essential questions about thinking and living. It is the questions we ask which guide our thinking. Sometimes we hear that those questions to which we cannot hope to give demonstrable answers are absolutist and meaningless. Yet this merely testifies to the vacuity of post-modernists – and, ironically, positivists – in their refusal to consider the larger problems of humanity. It is in response to the denial or marginalisation of these problems that we need to reassert the value and strength of reflection and theoretical conscience.

The streamlining of the intellect by society and the university for the sake of economic viability creates a barrier to independence of mind and the experience of alternative visions and legitimate philosophical doubt. If we compromise on creating the conditions for such experiences and concentrate instead on mere instruction in practical skills and the acquisition of factual knowledge, our faculty to judge the range of intellectual possibilities is impoverished. Our capacity, moreover, to assess the content of our teaching and research according to theoretical criteria is diminished. If we fail to ask the big critical questions, we abandon any connection between our particular activities and human reason as a whole. As long as empirical and theoretical praxis are not reflected upon philosophically, they remain of no educational value.

We as students and teachers have become vulnerable to market pressures. But even though our universities are likely to undergo drastic changes, we remain morally responsible for addressing the permanent questions which we cannot escape. Only a sustained respect for education will enable us to inquire, without being intimidated, into an intellectual crisis which mirrors the most profound crisis of modern civilisation. If we agree with Hegel that 'philosophy is its own time apprehended in thought',³ then International Relations is clearly the most appropriate discipline for philosophical reflection on global concerns. Indeed, it can be argued that 'in some ways International Relations has superseded previous endeavours in political philosophy because it is concerned with the survival of humanity as they were not'.⁴

3. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 11.

4. Philip Windsor, 'Preface' in Hugh Dyer and Leon Mangasarian (eds), *The Study of International Relations: The State of the Art* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. xi.

Insularity of Thought and the Politics of Research

The implication of the above argument is that the study of International Relations, in parallel with other disciplines and university education as a whole, is too narrow in its concerns and increasingly driven by 'market oriented' research questions which fail to take account of questions concerning humanity. These problems become clearer when we critically examine several of the dominant intellectual traditions of the discipline, and the politics of its research.

In examining three traditions of thought in International Relations – empiricism, liberalism and the English School – it becomes possible to identify the manner in which each contributes to an insularity of thought within the discipline. Each in its own way reinforces the lack of reflection on the interaction between subject and object, between agents and socio-historical structures: empiricism reinforces particularism through its emphasis on facts; liberalism through its inversion of the relationship between political ends and economic means; and the English School through its disdain for continental philosophy. Empiricism emphasises the primacy of verifiable facts; *a priori* concepts of a whole phenomenon are unacceptable because they cannot be verified. In the study of International Relations, this confines theoretical investigations to factual phenomena. The difficulty with this approach is that any fact has the same independent validity as any other fact. No credible value distinction can be made between essential and non-essential facts, and without such a distinction, no understanding of the whole can be achieved. The very principle of holism that ought to guide us in our reflections on international events is ostracised in a democracy of facts. Limiting our concerns to empirical research does not help us to understand better our situation in the world today.

Moreover, there are no isolated facts or events, nor does the mere connecting of events make a history. The connection of objective events must be based on a subjective substratum. It is the subject which reflectively gives events an organic coherence. Comprehension is possible only through the articulation and mediation of concepts. Without the effort to conceptualise the interaction between subject and object, between agents and the social forces which form an essential part of their existence, there can be no real education in thinking socio-historically about international relations. As Husserl so acutely observed, 'merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people'.⁵

Liberalism, with its intellectual roots in the Enlightenment, might seem better placed to address broader philosophical concerns in International Relations. But such faith is misplaced. In its present form, liberalism places primacy on an abstract rational self – egoistic and naturally free. Within International Relations, liberalism has shrunk to concern itself only with the quantitative growth of international economic relations, instead of reflecting on the possibilities of

5. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 6.

global economic politics. In consequence, it inverts the relationship between political ends and economic means.

The Hegelian critique of the liberal tradition is crucially relevant here. For Hegel, it is not subjectivity but the intersubjectivity of the process of reciprocal recognition which underlies all notions of freedom and composes the content of relations between subjects. Freedom is a dialectical task, and is socio-historically mediated. It is not a naturally given attribute of human existence; it is not a principle rooted in an appeal to an abstract rational self. Liberalism overestimates the capacity of the individual to rise above the socio-historical context in which he is embedded and, as Spinoza points out, to reflect upon it without consideration of local or temporal conditions.⁶

Hegel convincingly sublates the Lockean tradition when he argues that 'self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged'.⁷ Individual consciousness becomes socially self-conscious only as a result of reflective recognition, or, as Hegel puts it, 'they recognise *themselves* as *mutually recognising* one another'.⁸ This is true for all relationships between subjects, whether these are individual persons or individual states.⁹ Hegel's idea of freedom, understood as socially mediated self-consciousness, is the world historical turning point between antiquity and modernity. To explore this idea is, accordingly, 'the one single aim, action and goal of philosophy'.¹⁰ Nations and peoples seek to make themselves into states, because it is only then, as modernity shows us, that they can be recognised in their sense of personhood and dignity.

The problematic nature of liberalism, with its emphasis on egoistic economic self-interest, can only be mitigated through the qualitative consideration of the dialectical nature of social recognition, rights and justice (understood in terms of both equality and fairness). But added to this, we need a reasoned political vision of how to preserve the conditions of planetary life without thereby jeopardising not just sustainable but, more importantly, socially and environmentally acceptable growth. These important themes can only be developed and addressed through an Hegelian-informed discursive inquiry.

Empiricism and liberalism are both constitutive elements of the 'English School' of international relations. Notwithstanding the richness of this perspective, it suffers from a certain intellectual insularity and a lack of insight into the epistemological and social questions of international relations. In order

6. In Spinoza's words '*sub specie aeternitatis*', or under the form of eternity. Benedict de Spinoza, 'Ethics' in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (NY: Dover Publications, 1955), Vol. II, part II, prop. xxxi, p. 262.

7. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *op.cit.* in note 1, p. 111. See also the appropriate articles in Lawrence Stepelevich and David Lamb (eds), *Hegel's Philosophy of Action* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983).

8. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *op.cit.* in note 1, p. 112, italics in the original.

9. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, *op.cit.* in note 3, para. 331.

10. *Hegel's Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1978), para. 17.

to survive in a meaningful way, it needs to be more receptive to continental traditions of thought, not to retreat further into its own narrowly defined concepts. Empirical descriptions and conceptual definitions of isolated terms such as 'state' and 'society', 'order' and 'justice', or 'realism' and 'idealism' yield only limited, defective understandings of their meanings in relation to each other. A more rigorous philosophical understanding of the nature of interrelatedness is indispensable for expanding the boundaries of the empirical and paradigmatic assumptions of the English School.

These three traditions of thought have a certain internal consistency. But when viewed in the context of the increasing transformation of international into global concerns, they are of limited value. These changes signal a need to move beyond mainstream and classical international relations theory, to become open to other ways of looking at the world and its complexities, and to penetrate different philosophies. This movement must encompass a philosophical component with the courage and curiosity to ask new questions formulated in new idioms. But whether the study of international relations can successfully adapt to these intellectual exigencies will largely depend on the outcome of *political* deliberations on what kind of research is to be given the academic seal of approval.

Within the current political climate, it is largely praxis-oriented teaching and empirical research which receive this imprimatur. They have the highest visibility and are correspondingly rewarded. Much of this work is academically legitimate and exemplifies the 'helping' dimension of the profession. Moreover, expertise which attracts media and consultancy contracts is to be encouraged and appreciated. Yet at the same time, and particularly within the current climate, we need to promote and preserve the philosophical comprehension of international relations as a unitary whole.

The tensions between these two orientations – the 'practical' and the theoretical – should co-determine the type of research in which we engage. However, the former is becoming more and more dominant. This is regrettable. International relations is fascinating because it is the 'inter-disciplinary' discourse that confronts us with the most vital and difficult questions of our time. Our research must reflect the increasingly complex nature of international political life. Far from being trimmed to fit the needs of the 'market', research ought to be thematically extended and adjusted to the global dimensions of a 'post-modern' world.

The necessity of this co-determination becomes clear when we consider the current international situation and the manner in which we respond to it. The great events in international relations cannot be adequately analysed and reflected upon in the media, for instance, where current affairs are processed for instant consumption. Opinion, even if well-informed, reasoned and factually substantive, still needs to be judged and comprehended in conceptual terms. Being familiar with something is not the same as comprehending cognitively our perception of it. This requires an education in a different method of reasoning.

For example, some of the most serious, perplexing and consequential events that need to be studied from a politico-philosophical point of view are the fundamental transformations which have taken place in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. How are we to make sense of them? How are we to think about them historically? Within what context of reason and structure of knowledge do we address them? What is to be the point of reference for reflection? One recent offering is the popular media rendition of Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' argument. But this triumphalism of the 'West' and 'liberal democracy' is flawed and self-deluding. It lacks historical perspective and relies on a superficial reading and hence distorted understanding of Hegel's dialectic. The relationship between reason and the telos of history merits a more circumspect and thoughtful answer.¹¹ Even Francis Fukuyama makes clear his uncertainty as to whether history has vindicated its own rationality and direction when he writes: 'It is doubtful that we are at that point now, for despite the recent worldwide liberal revolution, the evidence...must remain provisionally inconclusive'.¹² In short, the world is once again in disorder. And if Hegel is correct that only non-historical epochs are times of happiness,¹³ then the twenty-first century is unlikely to be a period of ahistorical intellectual boredom. History will remain more inventive than we can possibly imagine.

International Relations needs to face the questions thrown up by events such as those in Eastern Europe. We cannot dodge them, waiting until the present recedes into the past before they are considered a viable topic for research and reflection. The lack of historical distance and sparse empirical data may make academic work problematic. But this is not the case when we assess the adequacy of past philosophical perspectives in illuminating our present condition.

The Scientific and the Political in International Relations

The politics and 'practicality' of teaching and research should not be viewed only in the context of the current climate in higher education, but also in light of the conceptual premises which underlie all reflections on international relations. These intellectual foundations are epistemology and political philosophy, and it is in these two areas that new formulae need to be found if a more profound understanding of international relations is to be reached.

Epistemologically, International Relations is often characterised as a 'social science'. But in using this phrase, two crucial questions should come immediately to mind: first, what is meant by characterising the discipline as

11. Philip Windsor (ed.), *Reason and History: or only a History of Reason?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990).

12. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), p. 339.

13. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History – Introduction*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 79.

'science', both with respect to its logical form and empirical content; and second, what do we understand the term 'social' to encompass?

In addressing the former question, we need to start with the recognition that analytical and positivistic knowledge or truth-claims about facts are no longer credible. There is no direct, simple, or unmediated access to things without and ideas within. Whatever our experience, it is, in the Hegelian sense, socio-historically mediated. Only reflexively dynamic approaches to the understanding of international and global processes constitute a basis for knowledge, and dialectic is the most appropriate mode of understanding social development and differentiation. To consider phenomena in isolation is to think in abstract terms, and merely requires the application of analytical intelligence. But to reflect upon them from the perspective of the growth of their social and historical relations is to reason synthetically and intellectually.¹⁴ The latter approach reflects the principle of mutuality, and it alone enriches and advances philosophical comprehension. It is this principle of mutuality or reciprocity which distinguishes Hegelian humanism.

The implications of adopting this approach are important for our understanding of the state. We have to consider not only a formal definition of what states are in their presumed separate existence, but also how to reflect upon the manifold content of the intercourse between states. It is these complex processes of social and economic relations which form the totality of global politics, and affect our sense of human dignity. But these differentiated processes develop only within socio-historical frameworks. They develop because of the reciprocity of subjective wills which states, over time, bring to bear in their relations with each other and with non-state actors, including their own and other states' citizens. But the states' absolute assertion of individual will is qualified, in reality, because their relations are intrinsically social expressions that are dependent and contingent upon the expression of the wills of others. What happens between subjects, such as states or other actors, who are for one another objects of wills, intentions and motivations, happens dialectically. It is for this reason that the historical results of political decisions are always different from what was intended.

One of the finest examples of Hegelian dialectical thinking is Clausewitz's distinction between absolute and real war.¹⁵ The dialectic is not a methodological device to be applied from without to a particular object of investigation. The dialectic is the principle of the part-whole relationship, and

14. Abstract thinking, Hegel writes, loses itself in endless chatter and empty definitions. It is the uneducated market talk to which one can react only with a jolly 'Sauve qui peut!'. See G.W.F. Hegel, 'Who Thinks Abstractly', in Walter Kaufman, *Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts and Commentary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), pp. 460-65.

15. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Although Clausewitz can also be seen in a Machiavellian and Kantian tradition, he reflects on this particular aspect of interstate action in the context of war in a Hegelian manner.

states that the logical locus of truth-claims does not reside in the individual, but is socially mediated. Truth develops in and through the medium of history. It refers to internal developmental structures, and reciprocal relations between actors, such as individuals or states, within their global context. Dialectic describes the human creation of these secular phenomena, and not their rational understanding, which earlier philosophic traditions deduced from transcendent and timeless, trans-social and trans-historical ontologies.

Whether we are sympathetic to him or not, Hegel, in an extraordinary way, pervades all of modern intellectual life. Whatever perspective we adopt – Marxist, existentialist, realist, idealist, critical theorist or post-modernist – his ideas remain a fundamental philosophical source. Any scientific attempt to probe the concrete mediation between subjectivity and the development of society as a whole, both national and international, must come to terms with Hegel.¹⁶ Since the problems he explored are still with us, a theory – let alone a philosophy – of international relations which does not come to terms with Hegel cannot be intelligible.¹⁷

Adopting an Hegelian-informed approach to International Relations is necessary if we wish to overcome the one-sidedness of factual propositions and comprehend the immanent mediation between subject and object in the social sciences. Dealing with the 'social' in 'social science' requires a deeper insight into the meaning of the political in international relations. The meaning of the political, of the relationship between the individual and his or her social environment, must be reflected upon not just in the national and international context, but in global terms. This is necessary because humankind, unlike the state, is not a polity. It is not an historical agent the way states are said to be agents. The distinction between the external policies of states and the global cannot be sustained. But how are we to understand the relationship between the individual, its universalisation, and humankind as its generic ground? Theoretical model-building as practised in sociology and political science cannot help us to comprehend the essence of the 'political' conceived in such terms. This is

16. Among the growing literature on the relevance of Hegel, see for instance Claus Daniel, *Hegel Verstehen: Eine Einführung in sein Denken* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1983); Jacques D'Hondt, *Hegel in his Time*, trans. John Burbidge (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1988); Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991).

17. While both terms are often used alternatively, 'theory' here denotes the covering laws of individual areas of research, and 'philosophy' the holistic reflection on International Relations which encompasses these theories. See, in this context, also Peter Savigear, 'International Relations and the Philosophy of History' in Michael Donelan, (ed.) *The Reason of States: A Study in International Political Theory* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), pp. 196-205. But Savigear misses the point when he argues that 'the Hegel of international relations has not yet appeared because the world has not yet escaped from the historical limits of the state'. This judgement is based on an inadequate understanding of dialectic. Hegel demonstrates that the state cannot exist in isolation but must be thought of in the plural. He also explains why humankind of necessity differentiates itself into socio-historical groups of which the state and the states-system are the complex modern manifestations. It is its understanding of this differentiation which makes Hegelian dialectic a compelling mode of philosophical reflection for International Relations.

possible only through a philosophical inquiry, a holistic reflection on the historical development from the essential and communal polis of antiquity to the existential and individual authenticity of modernity.

Tracing this development requires an attentive and patient reading of primary texts in political philosophy, particularly an understanding of how thinkers in the past justified the premises of their philosophical systems and of the historical and intellectual environment within which these systems developed. Merely browsing through secondary commentaries and interpretations is an inferior substitute for a genuine understanding of how philosophical judgements are made. A factual knowledge of what thinkers have written may be imparted, but little reasoning about it is inspired. The reliance on interpretive texts distorts and damages a tradition of thought with which we should be entering into direct dialogue. Such a dialogue is imperative for two reasons. First, it provides insight into ways in which historical and intellectual environments condition different conceptual and explanatory levels of consciousness. Second, it is only from the thinkers of the past that we can learn how to reflect upon the questions which concern the deepest issues of human affairs in their present and future global meaning. We need to listen to history, to what the past can teach us about the meaning of the 'political'.

Because we are now, more than ever, confronted with the global effects of state and socio-economic relations, we need new ideas which encompass the history of the states-system, contemporary international affairs and their origin in nature. Before we can hope to change our flawed practices, we must first correct our thinking. We need to encourage different ways of thinking about a holistic set of political relations, and to engage in imaginative reflection on difficult, irritating but inescapable questions. If we agree with Heidegger that 'questioning is the piety of thought', then the contemplation of human destiny is the noblest of our concerns.¹⁸ It is this caring ethic which ought to guide all our efforts towards a more comprehensive view of the essential link between international politics and the human condition, of what it means to be human.

A disturbing implication of the modern historical juncture is the growing awareness that we live in an age in which we have begun to tamper with the ecological basis of life. This situation has important implications for the philosophical comprehension of international relations. Whatever happens in international relations happens not only among socio-historical agents, such as states and individuals, but also between these agents and nature. Will nature sustain our history? Or will we abuse it until it loses patience and deprives us of the very life source of human existence?

18. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), p. 35.

Philosophy, International Relations and Ecology

To the ancient Greeks, the answer to the question, 'what is it to be human?', included the ideal of attaining harmony in life through the wisdom of reason. Reason was the integrative principle of one in all and all in one.¹⁹ Yet in the nuclear and ecological age, humankind, finding itself to be both subject and object, has abdicated the ideal of unifying reason and life. While technical rationality increases exponentially, wisdom stagnates and even regresses.

When we compare our biological knowledge, for instance, with that of Aristotle, our progress is immeasurable. But when we reflect on Aristotle's ethical consciousness and his understanding of the necessity to integrate human life into the whole of Being, we must doubt whether the modern idea of linear development is really progress. When we contrast the ancient sense of responsibility with the modern incapacity of scientists to think through the moral implications of Popperian technological and social engineering, we can almost speak of intellectual autism.²⁰

As a result of the ecological crisis, there is a need for new relations within humanity and between humankind and nature, for it is through humankind that nature speaks. Nature has brought forth human history, a form of organic development which internally transcends earlier forms of natural existence. It is this dual aspect of nature which is difficult to understand. The conjunction 'and' between 'nature and humankind' does not describe an opposing and external addition but manifests dialectically the ontological status of an inclusive and immanent part-whole relationship. For the Greeks, *physis* was always both the whole of Being, including humanity, and the ideal ground, the transcendent essence of justification for this being. It would never have occurred to the Ancients to regard humanity and nature as opposites.²¹ Ancient science did not aim at the conquest and control of nature, but was motivated by purely intellectual curiosity. For this reason technology and the practical application of knowledge found no place in it.²²

In many ways, the key to understanding the ecological crisis is to be found in the Cartesian conception of nature. The urge to conquer and control is precisely the result of the Cartesian dichotomy between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*,

19. This principle, in Greek *Hen Kai Pan*, goes back to the pre-Socratics, in particular, Heraclitus. Its meaning of 'flux' and 'becoming' is the origin of Hegel's dialectic and its organic understanding of holism. See also Manfred Riedel (ed.), *Hegel und die antike Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990).

20. Sir Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), vols. I and II.

21. It is illuminating that all major anti-Cartesian philosophies have taken recourse to the ancient notion of *physis* and Aristotelian teleology. Significant critics of modernity such as Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger demonstrate a profound knowledge and learning from the science and philosophy of antiquity. In this they differ from the fathers of modernity, Descartes and Kant.

22. Shmuel Sambursky, *The Physical World of the Greeks*, trans. M. Dagut (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 3.

between body and mind.²³ For Descartes the *extensa* of non-human nature is totally devoid of subjectivity. This conception of nature as something which is external to us is the foundation of modern experimental science. With it, science becomes the attempt to recreate nature, to become its 'master and possessor'.²⁴ Nature becomes quantifiable, an object subject to human sovereignty. This is theoretically supported by Vico's *verum-factum* principle, which states that, since humankind has made the civil world, the truth about it can be 'found within the modifications of the mind'.²⁵

The result of the Cartesian world-view is that human subjectivity has been decontextualised and radically reflected out of nature. Nature is now understood as a mere object from which humanity is separated. The necessary consequence is the devaluation and internal sundering of the relationship between nature and human history, and the relationship between agents within intersubjectivity. With regard to the latter, it is striking how the 'other' has been marginalised and no longer plays any role, either methodologically or ontologically.

To re-establish the wisdom of contextual thinking we need to adopt a practical philosophy of objective idealism.²⁶ Objective idealism interprets Hegel's principle of intersubjectivity in terms of a coherence between dialectic and social reality.²⁷ To think coherently is to establish the necessary link between empirically perceived reality and its dialectical presentation. It is in this sense that the idea of coherence constitutes the criterion of truth of holistic relations.²⁸ It is the opposite of transcendental and subjective idealism, in which human life is divorced from history and decoupled from nature.²⁹ In contrast, objective idealism offers a philosophy of nature which builds into itself the developmental stages of human history. It does not separate the human subject from its natural object, but conceives of both as interacting subjects. It presupposes that concrete, living subjectivity is already immanent in nature but that it is fully realised only in spirit, that is to say, in human history. To put it differently, not only does human life manifest itself in social relations, but the history of these relations

23. René Descartes, 'Discourse on Method' in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), Vol. I, Part V, p. 118.

24. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Part VI, p. 119.

25. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. T.G. Bergin and M.H. Fisch (NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), para. 331.

26. Vittorio Hösle, *Philosophie der Ökologischen Krise* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1991), pp. 43-68.

27. See, for instance, G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *op.cit.* in note 1, pp. 104-17.

28. The dialectical notion 'coherence', or identity in difference, refers to the beginning and end - in Hegel: past and present - of the organic development of, for instance, a tree (seed-fruit), a human being (child-adult), or society as a whole (ancient-modern). The extreme terms cohere with one another, and in this sense are identical with one another, through the progressive mediation of the historical stages within their development. Since social reality is dialectical, the true logical form of the description of its historical content is dialectic.

29. Hayo Krombach, 'Husserl and the Phenomenology of History' in Philip Windsor (ed.), *Reason and History*, *op.cit.* in note 11, pp. 89-112.

originates ultimately in nature and, as the GAIA theory suggests, in both animate and inanimate nature.³⁰ Accordingly, intersubjectivity exists in the dual but coherent relationship between historical agents and in that between history and nature.

The international states-system is arguably the most comprehensive manifestation of intersubjectivity. Yet it has also become the very cause of the deterioration of its planetary environment. The resulting ecological dilemma requires that we build on Hegel's discussion of socio-historical interaction and advance towards the harmonisation of the reciprocal relationship between nature and history.³¹ Such an approach would lead us to question whether there is a difference in the relationship between humanity and its artefacts, and between humanity and the natural origin of these artefacts. If there is not a qualitative difference, then it would be necessary to integrate the idea of the social into the notion of a state that legitimates its existence through a responsible relationship to nature. And this conception of state legitimacy, in turn, would lead us to ask whether one is entitled to own a part of nature in the same way that one can consider an artefact to be one's property.

But can the immanent relationship between nature and socio-historical interaction be formulated into a unified principle of objective idealism? The answer depends on whether dialectic is the most adequate principle for comprehending socio-historical activities, not only in themselves but also through their relationship to nature, in which they are ultimately grounded.³² A successful formulation would have to show how far the notion of intersubjectivity between history and nature can develop in and through itself. Only if this were possible would we have a guide for decision-making and action in national and international forums.

If objective idealism is not an adequate basis for an understanding of the relationship between nature and history, and if we therefore cannot establish a unified principle of nature and history in the Kantian sense of *quid iuris*, Hegel's socio-historical dialectic cannot be overcome.³³ This means, however, that human life will remain fundamentally tragic, because within the global context

30. James Lovelock, *GAIA: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), and *The Ages of GAIA: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

31. I have elsewhere delineated the dialectic between nature and history, but concentrated on analysing the *notional* mediation of the state to other states, to the states-system, and to humankind as their generic ground. See my *Hegelian Reflections on the Idea of Nuclear War: Dialectical Thinking and the Dialectic of Mankind* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

32. Vittorio Hösle, 'Begründungsfragen des objektiven Idealismus' in *Philosophie und Begründung*. Forum für Philosophie (ed.), Bad Homburg, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987), pp. 212-67.

33. Kant makes the essential distinction between *quid facti* and *quid iuris*, that is, the distinction between two questions: how are we to use categories of reasoning about the empirical world and whether this use is actually justified. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 120, A. 84.

the result of subjective will and decisions will always be different from those intended. Nature is likely to suffer as a consequence of being regarded as distinct from human history.

But should a coherent objective idealism be developed, establishing the immanent relationship between nature and history, then we might be in a position to enunciate an ethics for international relations. Such an ethics would be commensurate to the immense philosophical challenges of the ecological age.³⁴ It would provide us with a justification for protecting nature – of which we and the states-system are a part – not on the basis of a gut ‘green’ feeling but on the basis of philosophical and scientific reasoning.³⁵ It would also provide the philosophical basis for the requisite personal, national and international regimes.³⁶

Perhaps most importantly, objective idealism points out that the Cartesian distinction between mind and body has led to a unique debasement of humankind itself via the transformation of qualities into quantities. For if humankind is part of nature, then its dominance over nature also means dominance over itself. *Homo faber* controls and manipulates *homo sapiens*. Humankind becomes an object of social science and the victim of its own social engineering.

The implications of the Cartesian position are made evident by Marx. Reflecting on the modern economic condition, he notes that ‘individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists outside them as their fate’.³⁷ In such a situation man has not only dehumanised nature, he has himself become inhuman. In his critique of capitalism, Marx shows how the dominance of exchange-value, expressing itself quantitatively in money, over the use-value of a commodity is the equivalent of the Cartesian transformation of qualities into quantities. Since quantity implies infinity, the ‘movement of capital’, now internationalised and instantaneous, ‘is therefore limitless’ as well.³⁸

Marx contrasts this attitude of modernity with Aristotle’s distinction between *chrematistics*, or consumption, and *economia*, or the ‘management of a household’. Aristotle values the practical and political art of *economia*, because it entails an ethically acceptable limit in relation to the whole. But Aristotle rejects the idea of unlimited accumulation and boundless consumption precisely

34. Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1979); and *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988).

35. It is true that in Hegel’s objective idealism nature is not yet spiritualised. Inorganic nature is not yet understood in terms of its own self-creating history. Yet Hegel has already explicated an organic spirit-in-itself whose immanent telos is subjectivity. This subjectivity has, after long periods of development, transformed itself into the human spirit-for-itself. What is distinctive about Hegel’s thinking is that nature has its own dignity. See also the appropriate articles in Robert S. Cohen and Max W. Wartofsky (eds), *Hegel and the Sciences* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984).

36. Ian Rowlands and Malory Greene (eds), *Global Environmental Change and International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

37. *Marx Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), Vol. 28, p. 96.

38. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), Vol. 1, pp. 253-4.

because it has no such ethical measure. It revolves only around itself. For the Ancients, what was 'needed for the good life is not unlimited'.³⁹ This clearly entails a notion of balanced moderation. It is also a perspective that is clearly at odds with the modern 'science' of economics.

The ethics of Aristotelian *economia*, in conjunction with Hegel's objective idealism, are apposite in the current ecological crisis. It is becoming increasingly evident that the infinitism of the modern world can be neither continued nor universalised. The unrestrained attempt to break through any finitude in the name of a presumed infinite progress means not only the surrender of human reason: it may also produce the irreversible catastrophe of planetary collapse.

Conclusions

Economic systems entail political choices. But, as Steuart teaches us, these choices remain arbitrary as long as the unity of the polity is not apprehended in all its internal relations.⁴⁰ It is only with a view to the common good that economic activities can be controlled. And this vital connection, which Hegel clearly understood, cannot be grasped if the dialectical principle of the part-whole remains unknown.⁴¹ It is this notion of the dialectic which we need to extend beyond intra-state social arrangements, so as to include the states-system and the natural environment of humankind in our political considerations. To learn about and from this dialectical principle we must conscientiously listen to the philosophical tradition – a tradition which still judges us. To be responsible means to respond to that philosophical tradition.

Positivist social science, with its objectified descriptions of existing social values in national and international life, is unable to contribute a solution to the normative question of how we ought to live, or of what value system is more reasonable or more moral. Social science is no substitute for Socrates. A philosophy of objective idealism, however, may help us to address the question of what it is to be human. It reconciles intersubjectively the freedom of the self with that of the other. It does not regard nature as a mere *res extensa* but sees it as the very origin of the human *res cogitans*. It recognises not only that we

39. Aristotle, 'Politics', (1256b27-32, 1257b38-1258a1-2), in Jonathan Barnes (ed), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Vol. II. The Fowkes translation of *Capital* reads: 'Aristotle contrasts economics with "chrematistics"' (p. 253, note 6). But 'economics' is a misleading rendering of the Greek '*economia*', or the German '*Ökonomik*'. The latter two refer to political economy, suggesting an understanding of limited economic activities as a means for political ends. In stark contrast to his mis-translator, Marx is here in line with Aristotle. Steuart and Hegel, for instance. It is Aristotle's '*chrematistics*' which is close to modern theories of economics, with their inherent tendency to rationalise the means of maximisation without regard for the context of communal ends. It is because Marx ultimately rejects the idea of polity as a state that his *Capital* is a 'critique of political economy'.

40. Sir James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy*, (ed) A.S. Skinner (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), Vol. I, pp. 16, 122, 217, 325.

41. Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 186-204.

depend on nature, but that we can only live in a real historical world. If International Relations is to be credible as a humanistic academic discipline – as it should aspire to be – it needs to take such philosophical inquiry seriously. It must rise to the formidable task of holistic thinking. Without this, our reflections on the world we inhabit will be devoid of perspective, and our actions will remain spiritless and without guidance.

Whether we are ethically motivated, able and willing in practice to reconcile our search for freedom with a respect for nature, is uncertain. Human self-interest, narrowly defined, may continue to threaten any intersubjective agreement.⁴² How consensual and how creative politics can be remains an open question. The issues raised above are so important that we must live these questions now in the hope that we can also live gradually into their answers.

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42. David Pearce, 'Economics and the Global Environmental Challenge' in Ian Rowlands and Malory Greene (eds), *Global Environmental Change and International Relations*, *op.cit.* in note 36, p. 84.



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